

a higher stamp of lecturing might lead some to infer that I have written these observations with the idea of indulging myself in a little self-glorification. No one who knows me will think me guilty of such a piece of unpardonable vanity. My constant grief and regret is my inability to approach the ideal standard which I have been proposing. But still I maintain that it is better to aim at the sun in the heavens than at the weeds around one's feet. I am, etc.,

W. MITCHELL BANKS.

### THE FIRST OVARIOTOMY.

SIR,—In the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL for December 10th, 1873, under the above caption, Dr. E. D. Mapother of Dublin objects to your having assigned "the first performance of ovariectomy, in 1809, to Ephraim McDowell of Kentucky," but claims it for Dr. Robert Houstoun of Glasgow in 1701. Indeed, he had stepped a little out of his way to do this, as it seems to me, in his Introductory Address at the opening of the present session of the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland; for, in the report of Dr. Mapother's address, to be found in the JOURNAL for November 29th, 1873, I observe that, after eulogising the lives and labours of Mr. Cusack, Professor Macartney, Dr. Shekelton, Mr. Houston, and other members of the college in days past, he is reported as saying: "To a namesake of Dr. Houston, and to a namesake of his contemporary Ephraim McDowell, is assigned the first performance of ovariectomy. Professor Gross, in a memoir of the great Kentuckian of the latter name, asserts that, in 1809, he performed ovariectomy for the first time; but Dr. Mapother found, by the thirty-third volume of the *Philosophical Transactions*, that it was done successfully by a Dr. Houston in 1701."

Now we had thought this question of priority in ovariectomy long since settled by the admirable memoir of McDowell published by Dr. Gross in 1852. Had it not been, certainly the chapter on the early history of ovariectomy, to be found in Dr. Peaslee's work on *Ovarian Tumours*, is sufficient to settle the question of priority between Dr. Robert Houstoun and Dr. Ephraim McDowell.

If Dr. Mapother will refer to Dr. Peaslee's book, or to Mr. Spencer Wells's work on the *Diseases of the Ovaries*, he will find that he has been anticipated some twenty-four years, in his discovery of the case of Dr. Houstoun in the *Philosophical Transactions*; for he will find that Dr. Washington L. Atlee of Philadelphia, who has done as much for establishing ovariectomy in America as Mr. Wells for England, exhumed, and has, in the *American Journal of Medical Sciences* for April 1849, republished this same account of Dr. Houstoun's case, originally appearing in the *Philosophical Transactions*.

I will take the liberty of quoting a little more of the account than Dr. Mapother has done. After Dr. Houstoun had made his incision five inches long, to which Dr. Mapother refers, and trying vainly to get the contents of the sac to flow, he says:—"I took a strong fir-splinter, wrapped some loose lint about the end of it, and thrust it into the wound, and, by turning and winding it, I drew out about two yards in length of a substance thicker than any jelly, or rather like glue that is fresh made, and hung to dry; the breadth of it was above ten inches; this was followed by nine full quarts of such matter as I have met with in steatomatous and atheromatous tumours, with several hydatids of various sizes, containing a yellowish serum, the least of these bigger than an orange, with several large pieces of membranes, which seemed to be parts of the distended ovary. Then I squeezed out all I could, and stitched up the wound in three places, almost equidistant."

Dr. Mapother says "he does not say how he treated the pedicle"—and no wonder, since he never saw it.

Mr. Wells, in his book, defines ovariectomy:—"The operation for the removal of one or both ovaries." Dr. Peaslee, in reviewing Dr. Houstoun's case, says:—"I find that Dr. Houstoun did not perform ovariectomy. He simply made an incision, four inches long, through the abdominal walls and into the ovarian cyst (ovario-section), and evacuated its contents." And that Dr. Atlee, the original exhumed of the extract, does not look upon Dr. Houstoun as the originator of ovariectomy, may be inferred by the dedication of his book—"To the memory of Ephraim McDowell, M.D., of Kentucky, the Founder of Ovariectomy in 1809." So it seems that Dr. Mapother was slightly mistaken when he wrote his note to the JOURNAL, ascribing the first ovariectomy to Dr. Houstoun, declaring that such priority "will appear to any reader of Dr. Robert Houstoun's case."

That somebody may have preceded Dr. McDowell in performing ovariectomy, I will not say is impossible, since there is said to be "nothing new under the sun;" but we do aver that, to the present time, the most persevering antiquarian research has not revealed a case of true ovariectomy—a case of actual extirpation of diseased ovaries—before the case of Dr. Ephraim McDowell at Danville, Kentucky, in

1809. Even should such a case be ultimately found, it will, however, not at all detract from the credit of that extraordinary man, who, at the time of his performance of it, knew of no previous attempt to perform it, and who, no one yet has had the temerity to dispute, was the first to establish it as a legitimate operation in the medical world.

I am, etc., JOHN D. JACKSON, M.D.  
Danville, Kentucky, Jan. 10th, 1874.

## PUBLIC HEALTH AND POOR-LAW MEDICAL SERVICES.

### POOR-LAW MEDICAL OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION.

THE annual meeting, for the election of officers and passing the balance-sheet, will be held on Wednesday, April 8th, at 3 P.M. precisely, at the rooms of the Century Club, 6, Pall Mall Place (opposite the Oxford and Cambridge Club, Pall Mall). Dr. J. Lush, M.P., President of the Association, will take the chair.

On this occasion, matters of considerable importance, affecting the status and remuneration of the service, will come before the meeting for discussion. The Council consider that the present moment is a critical one for Poor-law Medical Officers, as the Premier has committed himself to the policy of sanitary reform, and many of his immediate colleagues in the Government have pledged themselves to deal with the question of local taxation, with a view to its more equitable incidence. The importance of this, as affecting the interests of the Poor-law Medical Officers, must be evident; the Council, therefore, trust that there may be a good attendance.

As the expenses of the Association during the next two or three months will be very considerable, the Council trust that all arrears of subscriptions may be paid to the honorary secretary, Mr. J. Wickham Barnes, 126, Gower Street, Bedford Square.

## OBITUARY.

### WILLIAM LYON, M.D., GLASGOW.

DR. WILLIAM LYON died on February 25th, at his residence, Brandon Place, West George Street, Glasgow. Dr. Lyon was admitted a Licentiate of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons in 1816, and became a Fellow in 1828. He commenced practice in the country, a few miles to the east of Glasgow, where for a number of years he passed a busy professional life. He afterwards removed to Glasgow city, and for many years practised there. Thirty years ago, Dr. Lyon was appointed surgeon to the Infirmary, and, about the same time, he became lecturer on surgery in the Portland Street School of Medicine, now defunct. He was the first medical officer appointed by the Barony Parochial Board, in connection with Barnhill Poorhouse; and, on the occasion of the second visitation of cholera in this district, he received the superintendence of that parish, under the Board of Health. He was also president of the Glasgow Medical Society and of the Medical-Chirurgical Society; indeed, in the course of his professional career, he was connected with every medical institution of a public nature in the city. He held a prominent position as a consulting surgeon in the West of Scotland. In 1859, the honorary degree of M.D. was conferred upon him by the University of Glasgow.

Dr. Lyon, who, during a long life, enjoyed excellent health, was of an active habit. He devoted himself assiduously to his profession, and, until 1851, when he visited the London Exhibition, could not be prevailed upon to take anything like a respite from his duties. Amongst his brethren he was held in high esteem for his great shrewdness, practical sagacity, fertility of resource, and indomitable perseverance. As an operator, his daring and his success were great. He was amongst the first in the West of Scotland to recognise the efficacy of ovariectomy.

### HENRY DIGBY COTES DELAMOTTE, M.R.C.S., Swanage, Dorset.

MR. DELAMOTTE was born at Oxford, in 1796, where he was educated with the view of entering the medical profession. He attended lectures given at the Middlesex Hospital by Sir Benjamin Brodie, Sir Charles Bell, Mr. Mayo, etc., and afterwards settled in Swanage, where he laboured for an uninterrupted period of fifty-five years, nearly the whole of that time as a Poor-law medical officer, and Admiralty surgeon.